

HERSETH SANDLIN ANNOUNCES HOUSE PASSAGE OF IMPORTANT VETERANS LEGISLATION

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Washington, DC (October 1, 2010) – This week, the House of Representatives passed a pair of bipartisan bills to help improve the lives of veterans and the services available to those veterans and their families. The bills are H.R. 3219, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 and H.R. 5360, the Housing, Employment and Living Programs (HELP) for Veterans Act of 2010. Both bills include measures authored by U.S. Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin. H.R. 3219 previously passed the Senate and now goes to the President for signature.

"I have worked to create opportunities for veterans in education, training, and employment, and to foster veteran-owned small businesses, so I'm proud that the Veterans' Benefits Act includes provisions that bolster benefits in these areas and will be signed into law," Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. "This broad legislation also includes provisions to improve pension programs, help end veteran homelessness, and improve burial benefits."

H.R. 3219 includes four bills that Rep. Herseth Sandlin originally introduced which have previously passed the House. The four bills are:

- H.R. 1037, the Pilot College Work Study Programs for Veterans Act of 2009. This legislation improves the educational benefits available to our country's veterans by expanding the scope of work-study activities available to veterans receiving educational benefits.
- H.R. 1088, the Mandatory Veteran Specialist Training Act. This legislation takes an important step toward providing better employment assistance to veterans by reducing the time that Department of Labor employment specialists have to complete specialized job training. Without this training, veterans don't have access to adequately trained employment specialists who can assist them with their employment needs. This problem was identified during a series of hearings before the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee that Rep. Herseth Sandlin chairs.

- H.R. 2461, the Veterans Small Business Verification Act. This legislation clarifies the responsibility of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to verify the veteran status of owners of small businesses listed in the VetBiz Vendor Information Pages database. It also requires that the VA notify small businesses already listed in the database of the need to verify their status. The database contains firms that may not qualify for veterans status since the verification process has been voluntary. Since firms registered in the database can qualify to receive set-aside or sole-source awards, this provision will ensure veterans are afforded the small business opportunities they are due.
- H.R. 1089, the Veterans Employment Rights Realignment Act. This legislation creates a three-year demonstration project to move the enforcement of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) for veterans and members of the Armed Services who are employed by Federal executive agencies to the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC). Under a previous demonstration project, OSC investigated some federal sector USERRA claims from 2004 to 2007. This demonstration project showed that OSC had the expertise and ability to quickly obtain corrective action for federally-employed veterans, and that success warranted the measures in H.R. 1089.

In addition to these four bills, H.R. 3219 includes provisions from H.R. 3484, also introduced by Rep. Herseth Sandlin, to reauthorize the VA's work-study program.

H.R. 5360, the Housing, Employment and Living Programs (HELP) for Veterans Act of 2010, which was originally introduced by Rep. Herseth Sandlin, also passed the House this week. H.R. 5360 started as the Blinded Veterans Adaptive Housing Improvement Act which aligns the VA's definition of blindness regarding eligibility for Specially Adapted Housing Grants with existing federal laws and guidelines. The EO Subcommittee held a hearing in November 2009 that identified the VA's excessively restrictive definition on blindness as having prevented some visually impaired veterans from qualifying for the assistance they need to modify their homes.

Since introduction, the HELP for Veterans Act has been expanded and improved in a bipartisan manner to include a number of other provisions, including:

- Improving education benefits, through apprenticeships, on-the-job training and flight training.
- Improving the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program by providing reimbursement for certified child care assistance for single parents.
- Giving the Department of Labor the authority to make grants to programs and facilities to provide services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children.

“The HELP for Veterans Act is a product of the cooperative and bipartisan spirit in which our Economic Opportunity subcommittee members worked to better serve our nation’s veterans,” said Herseth Sandlin.

Now that H.R. 5360 has passed the House, it has been sent to the Senate for consideration.□

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